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ABSTRACT

Student ratings of college professors play an important role in many employment decisions. One factor strongly associated with student ratings is teacher expressiveness. A study was conducted to explore the effects of teacher expressiveness, teacher sex, and student sex on student ratings of their instructor, student perceptions of their instructor's gender-linked characteristics, and on student achievement. Forty male and 40 female undergraduate students viewed a videotape of either a male or female instructor acting either expressively or nonexpressively. Students then completed a student rating form, the short form of the Bem Sex Role Inventory to rate the instructor's personality, and a short multiple-choice test on lecture content. The results revealed that expressive instructors received the most positive student ratings on all measures, although expressiveness interacted with teacher sex on the rating of scholarship such that the expressive male instructor was rated the lowest. Expressiveness also interacted with both teacher sex and student sex on achievement scores. Student-perceived teacher sex-typing may partially explain the effect of expressiveness on student ratings. (Author/NB)

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Teacher Expressiveness: Effects of Teacher Sex and Student Sex

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Abstract

Teacher expressiveness typically results in favorable student ratings, although teacher sex may affect these results. Eighty students viewed a videotape of either a male or female instructor acting either expressively or nonexpressively. Expressive instructors received the most positive student ratings on all measures, although expressiveness interacted with teacher sex on the rating of scholarship such that the expressive male instructor was rated the lowest. Expressiveness also interacted with both teacher sex and student sex on achievement scores. Student-perceived teacher sex-typing may partially explain the effect of expressiveness on student ratings.

Paper presented at the meeting of the American Psychological Association, New York City, August, 1987.

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Teacher Expressiveness: Effects of Teacher Sex and Student Sex

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Problem

Student ratings of college professors play an important role in many employment decisions. One factor strongly associated with student ratings is teacher expressiveness; teachers who gesticulate and vary their nonverbal cues tend to be rated more highly than teachers who are relatively nonexpressive, regardless of the content of their lectures (Abrami, Leventhal, & Perry, 1982; Marsh & Ware, 1982). However, this positive effect of expressiveness may be true mainly for male professors and may be related to gender-linked personality characteristics (Basow & Distenfeld, 1985). Teacher sex also may interact with student sex in student ratings (Basow & Silberg, 1987). Student achievement tends to be less affected than student ratings by teacher expressiveness although here, too, an interaction with teacher sex sometimes has been found (Abrami, et al., 1982; Basow & Distenfeld, 1985).

The present study attempts to explore these issues further by examining the effects of teacher expressiveness, teacher sex, and student sex on student ratings of their instructor, student perceptions of their instructor's gender-linked characteristics, and on student achievement. The videotapes used by Basow and Distenfeld (1985) are employed in order to compare results, although the present study uses a more widely-used student rating form (Leventhal, Perry, & Abrami, 1977, adapted from Hildebrand & Wilson, 1970), a multiple-choice content test rather than short answers, and a standard measure of professor sex-typing (Bem Sex Role Inventory, Bem, 1981).

Subjects

Subjects were 40 male and 40 female undergraduates from a private college in the northeastern U.S. They received extra credit in their introductory psychology courses for participation.

Procedures

Ten males and ten female students were randomly assigned to one of the following four groups: viewing an expressive or nonexpressive male or female instructor giving a 7-min. lecture on local history. (For videotape details, see Basow & Distenfeld, 1985.) Students viewed the presentation individually on a 10-in. screen in a laboratory cubicle.

Following the tape presentation, students received, in the following order: the 26-question student rating form; the short form of the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) to rate the instructor's personality; and a 15-item multiple-choice test on the lecture content.

Results

The student rating form (utilizing a 7-point scale, with low scores indicating more positive ratings) was scored on the basis of five factor scores composed of five questions each, plus one question regarding general teaching ability (Overall). The five factors were: Scholarship, Organization, Instructor-Group Interaction, Instructor-Student Interaction, and Dynamism/Enthusiasm. The BSRI was scored for "masculinity" (instrumental traits) and "femininity" (nurturant/expressive traits). These eight scores plus the quiz score were the dependent variables in a three-way (Teacher Expressivness X Teacher Sex X Student Sex) MANOVA. See Table 1 for the mean ratings on each variable.

Place Table 1 about here

The only significant main effect was for Teacher Expressiveness ($F(9,64) = 2.48$, $p = .017$). On all measures, the expressive instructors received more positive ratings. This effect was significant on univariate tests of Overall ability ($F(1,72) = 4.7$, $p = .033$), Instructor-Student Interaction ($F = 5.47$, $p = .022$), and Dynamism/Enthusiasm ($F = 7.78$, $p = .007$). Although the two-way multivariate interaction between Teacher Expressiveness and Teacher Sex did not reach significance ($p = .13$), two univariate tests did: Scholarship ($F = 4.9$, $p = .03$) and Masculinity ($F = 11.71$, $p = .001$). The means showed a reverse effect of expressiveness for male and female instructors: the female instructor in the expressive condition was rated as more scholarly and more "masculine" than in the nonexpressive condition. However, the male instructor in the expressive condition was rated as less scholarly and "masculine" than in the nonexpressive condition. The same trend appeared in ratings of overall ability ($p = .06$), instructor-student interaction ($p = .07$), and instructor-group interaction ($p = .08$).

Although the three-way interaction did not reach significance on the multivariate test, the univariate test for the Quiz results was significant at $p = .032$. These results indicate that the most variable effects of expressiveness occurred with the female instructor. Female students learned least in the expressive female condition whereas male students learned least in the nonexpressive female condition. With the male instructor, expressiveness had no differential effect for female students and a negative effect for male students.

Conclusions

As previous research has found, expressive instructors receive more positive ratings from students than nonexpressive instructors (Abrami et al., 1982; Basow & Distenfeld, 1985; Marsh & Ware, 1982). As would be expected, this positive effect occurs most strongly on ratings of instructor dynamism and enthusiasm, but it also appears on

ratings of how well an instructor interacts with students and on ratings of overallability. As other research has found (Basow & Silberg, 1987), overall ability ratings are closely linked with ratings of dynamism and enthusiasm.

As Basow and Distenfeld (1985) found, expressiveness does have different effects depending on the sex of the instructor, at least for some measures. Unlike Basow and Distenfeld, however, expressiveness appears to enhance the ratings of scholarship for a female instructor while impairing those ratings for a male instructor. The different questions used in this study than in Basow and Distenfeld (1985) may account for the different pattern of results. The specific finding regarding scholarship in the present study may be due to the finding that expressiveness enhances the instrumental ("masculinity") ratings of the female instructor while decreasing those ratings for the male instructor. Other research (Basow & Silberg, 1987) has found instrumental/agentic traits to be very strongly related to student ratings of instructors. When these ratings as well as those on the "femininity" scale were used as covariates in the present study, the significant interaction between teacher sex and teacher expressiveness on Scholarship was eliminated. Also eliminated was the significant main effect of expressiveness on overall ability and Instructor-student interaction. What remained was the significant main effect of expressiveness on ratings of Dynamism/enthusiasm and the significant three-way interaction on the quiz results.

The significant three-way interaction among teacher sex, teacher expressiveness, and student sex on quiz results is intriguing. It suggests that male and female students react to expressiveness in their instructors in different ways depending on the sex of the instructor. Although expressiveness is generally rated positively, and enhances the ratings of scholarship for the female instructor, female students of the expressive female instructor did most poorly on the achievement test. In contrast, when the female instructor was nonexpressive, male students performed most poorly. Differential student attention is a possible underlying factor, with male students paying less attention to a female instructor who is not expressive, and female students paying less attention to a female instructor who is expressive. This greater variability in reactions to a female instructor is in line with other research (e.g., Basow & Silberg, 1987) and needs further exploration. Quiz results were not significantly correlated with any student rating measure, which suggests that students can learn from a teacher even if they don't think highly of her or him. Although Basow and Distenfeld (1985) found teacher sex and teacher expressiveness to interact on their quiz results, a three-way interaction with student sex was not found. The different type of achievement test used may be responsible for the different results.

Although this research has certain limitations, being a laboratory rather than a field study, it suggests the importance of both teacher sex and student sex in research on

teacher expressiveness.

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Dependent Variables as a Function of Teacher Expressiveness and Sex and Student Sex

		Teacher			
		Expressive		Nonexpressive	
Variable		Male	Female	Male	Female
Overall ability[a*]					
Male students	M	3.6	3.5	3.4	3.8
	SD	.7	1.1	.8	.8
Female students	M	3.6	3.0	3.9	4.1
	SD	.7	.9	.6	.3
	Overall M	3.6	3.2	3.6	4.0
Scholarship					
Male students	M	16.5	15.3	14.8	16.4
	SD	2.9	3.3	2.2	3.9
Female students	M	16.4	13.7	15.6	15.7
	SD	1.9	2.9	1.6	3.2
	Overall M*	16.4	14.5	15.2	16.0
Organization					
Male students	M	14.0	15.0	11.2	13.3
	SD	5.1	4.4	1.8	7.7
Female students	M	13.9	12.5	12.5	14.4
	SD	4.2	5.7	3.4	5.1
	Overall M	14.0	13.8	11.8	13.8
Instructor-group interaction					
Male students	M	17.8	15.5	17.2	19.7
	SD	3.1	4.3	2.2	3.9
Female students	M	16.6	15.7	17.3	17.3
	SD	3.0	2.8	2.3	5.7
	Overall M	17.2	15.6	17.2	18.5
Instructor-student interaction[a*]					
Male students	M	15.4	13.5	15.5	18.3
	SD	3.5	4.9	1.7	2.7
Female students	M	15.3	13.7	16.2	16.5
	SD	2.2	4.4	2.9	4.2
	Overall M	15.4	13.6	15.8	16.8

(table continues)

Variable		Teacher: Expressive Male	Expressive Female	Nonexpressive Male	Nonexpressive Female
Dynamism/enthusiasm[a]**					
Male students	M	16.4	14.4	15.5	18.3
	SD	5.4	5.8	2.8	4.3
Female students	M	14.7	12.5	18.4	16.6
	SD	2.1	4.7	4.1	4.3
	Overall M	15.6	13.4	17.0	17.4
Quiz score[b]*					
Male students	M	10.5	10.7	11.7	9.7
	SD	2.2	1.9	2.2	1.8
Female students	M	11.2	9.4	11.5	11.5
	SD	1.9	2.6	2.2	1.4
	Overall M	10.8	10.0	11.6	10.6
"Masculinity"					
Male students	M	3.8	4.7	4.3	3.3
	SD	1.4	1.1	.8	1.0
Female students	M	3.7	4.7	4.0	3.7
	SD	.9	.4	1.4	1.1
	Overall M**	3.8	4.7	4.2	3.5
"Femininity"					
Male students	M	4.5	4.1	3.7	4.4
	SD	.8	1.2	1.0	1.1
Female students	M	4.3	4.5	4.0	3.7
	SD	1.0	.9	1.4	1.1
	Overall M	4.4	4.3	3.7	4.2

Note. On the first six variables, lower scores are more positive. Score ranges: 1 - 7 on Overall ability, 5 - 35 on Scholarship, Organization, Instructor-group interaction, Instructor-student interaction, and Dynamism/enthusiasm, 0 - 15 on Quiz, 1 - 7 on "Masculinity" and "Femininity".

[a]Significant main effect for Teacher Expressiveness. [b]Significant three-way interaction.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.